Engaging Community Partners as Co-Educators in Teacher Education

Reflections from Pre-Service Teachers on a Justice-Based Service-Learning Program

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Introduction

Universities have embraced community-engaged learning opportunities for their faculty and students, and this approach has burgeoned in the last two decades. Offering both curricular and co-curricular service-learning experiences for undergraduate students serves several purposes, including improving students' positive experiences, enhancing their connections with community during their degree programs, and the reciprocal benefits with the community partners offering these placements (Butin, 2010; Hatcher & Bringle, 2012; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2017).

Increasingly, scholars in this field have rightly argued for increased attention to equity and social justice in all community-engaged learning (Grain & Lund, 2016; Lund, 2018; Mitchell, 2010). This research studies a justice-based program that was originally developed from an initiation by a community agency seeking a collaboration with a postsecondary program.

For this article, we define *service-learning* as an experience in which students are provided an opportunity to participate in an organized activity in the community that serves both the needs of the group or agency involved and the educational goals of the program organizers. Ideally, students are encouraged to reflect critically on their service activity to seek a deeper understanding of community issues and course concepts, as well as enhanced self-development in civic responsibility and equity issues (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Cipolle, 2010).

Many positive outcomes of service-learning include improved academic performance; stronger relationships with faculty members; and an increased ability to apply learning across various settings, including future careers (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000). Likewise, attending to the voices and needs of community partners can enrich any service-learning program (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000); Nduna (2007) expressed with hope that "service-learning practice could improve, and its impact on communities could increase if the voice of the community is heard" (p. 69).

Toward this end, guiding questions for this study included the following:

> How might preservice teachers' experiences in justice-based service-learning placements inform their own critical understandings of the role of the teacher and schools in supporting children and youth from immigrant backgrounds?
>
> How can an organized justice-based service-learning opportunity mutually benefit preservice teachers, immigrant youth participants, the community agencies, and the university's professional program?

About the Service-Learning Program for Diversity

The Service-Learning Program for Diversity (SLPD) is a community-initiated partnership that initially included the University of Calgary's Werklund School of Education, the Centre for Community-Engaged Learning (CCEL), and CARE for Ethno-cultural Children and Youth (CARE) and its member organizations. The SLPD program was initiated by CARE and its member organizations in response to community leaders' and practitioners' desire to address systemic issues faced by children and youth of immigrant families.

A key issue centered on enhancing academic achievement in children and youth from immigrant backgrounds by strengthening cultural responsiveness in future generations of teachers. Together, faculty from the university and member organizations developed the program using a social justice framework that addressed the needs and strengths of all partners. Specifically, community organizations identified the need to strengthen cultural responsiveness in teachers and were eager to share their practical knowledge and expertise with the university program and students

The Werklund School of Education identified the need to strengthen links between theories of social justice and practical experiences of their students. A particular approach we developed was in fostering "cultural humility" rather than the typical "cultural competency" model (Lund & Lee, 2015). The CCEL was able to respond to its mandate while offering expertise in operationalizing community–university collaborations. The partners recognized that service-

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learning was an ideal model to facilitate the principles critical to the success of the partnership: reciprocity and the ongoing process of understanding theory, participating in meaningful practice, and engaging in critical reflection.

A growing diversity among the youth population, along with greater recognition of marginalized identities, means that professionals are expected to meet the needs of young people, including those with disabilities, those with LGBTQ+ identities, and Indigenous children and youth. The SLPD provides preservice teachers with weekly experiential learning opportunities that better prepare them for the complex needs of the classroom, and it informs professional education across academic disciplines.

Each year, we place preservice teachers with community-based organizations for at least 3 hours a week in addition to their online course. It is designed to use community-driven research to implement system-level changes that contribute to the quality of life for diverse children and youth and their families. This initiative has grown to include multiple ongoing partnerships with 12 local organizations.

An important aspect of the community-engaged learning that takes place in this course is that it is complementary with the weekly assignments and readings, which include a key textbook on social justice concepts (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017) and supplementary weekly readings from a range of professional and scholarly sources on Indigenous education, LGBTQ+ issues in schools, gender identity, immigration and integration, and critical disability issues, among others, as explained in further detail in the following section.

A large body of literature points to the need for service-learning partnerships to better promote both student and higher education outcomes and to honor the important role of community organizations in addressing community-defined needs (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Nduna, 2007; Stoecker et al., 2009). The SLPD responds to that recommendation by adopting a justice-based approach, which is distinct from typical service-learning experiences in that it requires preservice teachers to examine their privilege and the causes of injustice and to work for social change (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). This approach ideally suits the long-term goals identified by CARE and its member organizations.

This article examines from the perspective of preservice teachers how justice-based service-learning experiences can benefit from the support of community mentors and support their understanding of teachers' role in providing equitable learning experiences for children and youth of immigrant and refugee families.

Theoretical Framework

This research attends to power and privilege and is informed by critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2011; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017) to reveal and better understand the underlying complex structural issues within education and other institutions. We seek an emancipatory educational framework following Freire (1970), through which we honor the experiences of preservice teachers and community agencies as active agents in a collaborative endeavor to create meaningful service-learning experiences.

By engaging in difficult and critical conversations about our socialization, identity formation, and hidden forms of oppression, we can better "examine the links among teacher preparation for diversity and teachers' own learning, their professional practices, and their K–12 students' learning" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004, p. 966). Numerous educational researchers have documented the resistance of many preservice teachers to tackling social justice issues in critical ways in their teacher education programs (e.g., Demoiny, 2017; Grant et al., 2018).

In a small study of preservice social studies teachers, Demoiny (2017) found that "participants all recognized a need for the inclusion of race in the social studies curriculum, yet they were at different levels in the importance they placed on racial inclusion and in their ability to carry out their stated desires" (p. 32).

Likewise, in their analysis of the responses of White preservice teachers, Grant et al. (2018) concluded that "the majority of students . . . were open to learning about diversity, but they struggled with integrating new knowledge and insights that they learned from their courses into their existing worldviews and pedagogies" (p. 19).

Our approaches in the Diversity in Learning course and in the service-learning program consciously encourage uncomfortable conversations that can help preservice teachers overcome potential "bottlenecks" on their learning paths (Gorski et al., 2012).

During the semester of this study, the central diversity course text was the earlier edition of Sensoy and DiAngelo's (2017) *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*. Using sections of this text and other weekly readings, the students are drawn into an ongoing critical self-evaluation of their own socialization into a racialized and inequitable world. A focus is on the complexity of our—and our students'—identities and how systems of power and privilege create hierarchical structures in our society, including inequitable access to resources.

Students undertake a range of learning activities, including class discussions of weekly readings; in-class presentations on key topics and concepts; and learning from expert guest speakers on specific topics, such as gender identity, Indigenous issues, and religious diversity. Assignments include group projects on social justice themes, lesson planning for diversity, and a "discovering diversity" assignment that invites students to participate in community experiences outside their comfort zones.

Furthermore, the SLPD provides unique, experiential learning opportunities by integrating both campus and community learning; these educative opportunities inevitably lead to deeper engagement with the themes of the course and to improved academic outcomes. In previous course evaluations, 100% of students indicated they would consider taking another service-learning course because of the ability to draw connections between classroom theory and practice.

Methods

Student Participants

Of the 380 first-year BEd students required to take EDUC 450: Diversity in Learning, 35 students requested to participate in the service-learning option, whereas the remainder did not request to participate in the program. Students learned about the service-learning option through a community fair hosted by the education faculty, which all students were strongly encouraged to attend; from the faculty website; and from an email invitation sent directly to all the first-year students.

Of the 35 students registered for the service-learning option, 10 self-selected to participate in the research project and completed all components of the research.Nine participants identified as female; one identified as male. Eight

participants were between 23 and 27 years old, and two participants were in their late 30s. Six participants self-identified as White or Anglo-Canadian, one participant identified as Asian Indian, one participant identified as Scottish and Icelandic, and two participants did not specify. All participants shared that English was their primary language. Three participants also spoke French, and two participants also spoke Spanish.

All participants had a previous undergraduate degree. Two participants had never taken a diversity-focused course or participated in diversity training. They said they were "very new" to social justice and diversity education. Five participants shared that they had taken a course that touched on diversity (i.e., social work, sociology, ethnomethodology) but had not taken a course that focused specifically on social justice or diversity. A few of these participants had engaged in various volunteer and work experiences that involved different forms of diversity (i.e., working in animal shelters, with homeless people, with elders, and/or with Aboriginal youth).

Two participants shared that they had taken many courses that focused on social justice and diversity through degree programs in women's studies and political science/developmental economics. One participant shared that she did not take any courses on diversity but had extensive overseas experience, particularly in the area of human trafficking.

Data Collection

The research participants took part in one initial-placement open-ended qualitative interview and one postplacement interview, with critical attention to issues of power and privilege, following the tenor and intent of critical ethnography (Madison, 2012). The research assistant observed and recorded research participants' comments during the EDUC 450 class. Until the final course grades were submitted, only the research assistant was aware of the names of the research participants, the locations of their community placements, and the names of their community mentors.

Research participants chose pseudonyms that were used throughout the research project, and community mentor names were kept confidential throughout research documentation. Research participants were sent copies via email of both their pre- and postinterview transcripts and were given a 1-week opportunity to make any changes or clarifications prior to submission of the data to the faculty; none offered any changes or clarifications to the transcripts.

Data Analysis

This research is derived from 20 recorded interviews and transcripts and observations documented during class time. Themes were coded and clustered along meaningful recurrent topics based on protocols of critical ethnography, following Madison (2012), with the principal researcher and a research assistant providing a form of data triangulation on the eventual key emergent themes.

Findings and Discussion

Three predominant themes emerged from the data:

1. Justice-based service-learning can foster cultural humility and greater self-awareness and reflection in preservice teachers;

2. Justice-based service-learning can enhance preservice teachers' ability to understand community engagement as a reciprocal relationship that moves beyond a focus on their individual benefits and toward addressing broader social needs and opportunities; and

3. Justice-based service-learning can strengthen preservice teachers' confidence and initiative to address social justice issues in school contexts.

Following are discussions of the themes and some exemplar illustrative quotations from the research participants.

Emergent Theme 1

Several preservice teachers articulated an expanded and deepened understanding of their identity, their values, and how the service-learning program challenged their worldviews:

> [The service-learning program] definitely challenged my view of the world, and how my upbringing has impacted my perception of the world and how that might come across to other people who didn't have the same upbringing or background. So, challenging the whole notion of Whiteness and what that means. I grew up in a very multicultural school and environment. Coming out of school, I didn't have any White friends, so I never really thought about, "Oh. You're White, and this is how you come across," because I've always had very multicultural friends, experiences, and family members. I think being more aware of that has helped. I'm not just a White person with White friends. So, that's been pretty cool to think about. (Zoey)

> I definitely learned a lot from my project where we had to go out and be in a situation that was uncomfortable. I went to a seminar for Muslim women; it was called Reconnecting with Allah, but for me it seemed like it was three hours of what [the women] weren't allowed to do. It was very overwhelming for me. There were a couple of teenage girls next to us that go to high school and we were asking them questions. One of the girls was saying how she just started wearing her hijab, how she didn't have to, and her mom doesn't wear it around the house. For her, it was a choice and she was trying to figure it all out. So I thought I was overwhelmed, but I can't imagine how she must feel. She's trying to make sense of and connect two worlds that are really quite different: She has all her friends that she grew up with that has never seen her wear a hijab, and now she's wearing one, so she's trying to explain that to them. And now she's getting this new list of things that might impede her from doing things that she used to do now that she's becoming a woman. Trying to negotiate the two; that's got to be stressful. And working with [the youth in the program], even though they weren't so openly explicit about any feelings—negative or positive—that they had about their ethnicities, just having a general compassion, or sense of understanding, or awareness that I know absolutely nothing . . . because the girl that [I met at the seminar for Muslim women], she could have a million freaking things going on and the last thing that she needs is a teacher that has an attitude about Muslim women or something. Being curious in a healthy, open-minded, friendly way is I think the only way that you're going to connect with people from diverse backgrounds or who are different from you. (Maggie May)

A number of the preservice teachers commented on their growing ability to ask questions before making assumptions about children and youth of immigrant families and their families. This required preservice teachers to challenge their preconceived notions of normality, as one preservice teacher reported:

> [A youth in the community program] said his parents don't cook for him. He eats Subway *every* single day for dinner. So, I don't know the specifics of his home situation, but to me, I can't help but judge and be like, "They shouldn't be doing this to this kid. They need to be cooking for him." But I know that's a luxury, maybe? So it was hard for me in terms of not—I know this sounds terrible—not judging their families. And thinking, "If this was my kid, I'd do things differently . . ." Who's to say that the way my parents raised me was better? And obviously I come from a *way* different background. I'm from Winnipeg, but I grew up in the suburbs. My mom works part time, so she's always at home for me. So, it's hard to not come with my own perspective on how things "should" be. (Elizabeth)

> I wouldn't say there was a moment where I was like, "This is *exactly* what we talked about in class," but I feel there were situations where I may have reacted differently in the past if I wasn't aware of what we talked about in class. Like, being more open-minded and accepting other people's beliefs, and being more aware of what I say and how I say it, and how it might affect other people. There were times at [the community placement] where I was like, "Oh! This is a weird situation," and I would be like, "Okay, you need to stop and think about what you're going to say and not just blurt out anything" because you never know what will happen. It was nice to take that moment and stop and think about what you're doing, instead of just reacting. (Katie)

It is worth noting that Katie had identified herself as "very new" to exploring diversity issues at any depth. Other preservice teachers described a growing understanding of the lived experiences of children and youth from immigrant backgrounds, refugee children and youth, and Indigenous children and youth and how these understandings relate to preservice teachers' identities as individuals and teachers:

> There was a stark contrast between how they behaved with us, and when their home life came into proximity. Those incidents, those insights into their home life, were the most enlightening. Their behavior day-to-day in the program indicated to me that they've learned to behave and act in a certain way in school, and by extension, in the after-school program: "Here's an after-school program that we have to be in, or are in, or want to be in. Because we're in this program in Calgary, this is how we act, but at home, we don't act this way." They knew that they behaved differently. So when something happened in that particular day, they would, between each other, negotiate how they needed to respond. Like, if their home life came into whatever we were doing, others would pipe up and say, "Oh! No! We can't do that here." Or "We have to wait until we go home to talk about this." So, that was interesting for me to see because being born here in Alberta, I didn't experience that disconnect; my home life was my school life. I didn't behave, in my mind anyways, differently. But these kids were aware and were choosing to behave and present themselves differently based on what aspect of the community or home life that they were in that moment. (William)

The perceived contrast felt by the Canadian-born preservice teacher between his upbringing and that of his immigrant students highlights the Eurocentric nature of schooling. He expresses that his home life was a direct reflection of his school life, showing a growing understanding that students not socialized in this country must undertake a constant cultural shifting between their home and school cultures.

A challenge for schools is to enact and foster more robust notions of engaged citizenship that, as Banks (2018) exhorted, "provide recognition for marginalized groups such as incorporating aspects of their cultures and symbols into the nation's master narrative and legitimizing their home and community languages" (p. 369). Other preservice teachers expressed a growing awareness of, and emotional reaction to, the significant traumas that students had experienced before coming to Canada:

> I felt like [one youth in the community placement] just needed to talk, so she just started talking about—she's from Syria—and she was telling me how she left and how some of her friends aren't around anymore because of all the bombings and all that stuff. I didn't want to cry in front of her, but I went to my car and just started crying and thinking, "I can't believe that happened." [The youth] was saying that on the way to the airport, there were bodies on the road. Just the way she was describing it, it was so intense. I think it opened my mind a little bit to things that could be affecting kids in your classroom. You would have never known. She seemed like a normal girl but when she started talking about it, I didn't know it was that bad—like, I knew she was a refugee, but I didn't realize it was *that* bad and that she went through those experiences. So, I guess being more open-minded about things and you can't assume anything about anyone. (Lisa)

> In relation to what we were learning in the class, I didn't really realize how much you have to go through as an immigrant. Not only were they learning the language, a lot of times they had to find resources, they had to find housing. My first couple of weeks, when I was touring CCIS, I saw a program that they have for children of refugees. That made me realize that a lot of kids are struggling with a lot of different things. I think that impacted how I will view my future classroom. Just knowing the possible struggles that there are, and they were really sad. (Norma)

Although these comments focus on tremendous challenges and barriers faced by some children and youth of immigrant and refugee families, Norma reported that she had not had a great deal of experience with diversity and social justice. Her views suggest that recognizing the barriers can be particularly important for people who are starting to view the world through a more critical lens.

Several preservice teachers commented on how the service-learning program helped to "put a face" on the literature on marginalized children and youth and their families and the theories on social justice:

> The other thing that sort of surprised me [about being in the service-learning program] is to have the human face on it a little bit more. I've known a lot of Aboriginal people, but they've all been kind of ones who made it through the system. They were in university, or whatever. And you certainly know about some of the troubles of living on reserves. When Aboriginal people come to the city,

> we all know about some of those problems and struggles and the statistics, but to actually put a face to it; to actually see how much pain there is in almost everybody's story around their identity. Like, things around how they felt, how they were treated, the types of circumstances that grew up in, the number of serious, *serious* offenses against people's family members and loved ones: Murders, suicides, on and on and on. That, I have to say, is something that I did not have a proper perspective on. (Leslie)

The suggestions recorded here echo the work being undertaken in Canada following the release of the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (TRCC; 2015), in which guidelines for educators in dealing with specific challenges and promising practices for Indigenous students are offered. Specific recommendations include providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation, improving education attainment levels and success rates, and developing culturally appropriate curricula, among several others (p. 2). Fostering an appreciation of the importance and significance of this work in preservice teachers is a key strength of the SLPD:

> [The service-learning program] brought to life the critical reflection that we were asked to do in class. So, coming from a background in the social sciences, I've looked at articles and studied things endlessly, and I've had to critique them and try to incorporate them into my own frame. Especially coming to the issues of ethnicity, immigration, and diversity, [the service-learning] really brought this to life, and it really guided how I applied my learning in the classroom to the assessments that we were being asked to do. (William)

Emergent Theme 2

During the preplacement interviews, research participants were asked what they hoped to take away from the SLPD. Several participants spoke exclusively about a desire to improve their own ability to be a better teacher, to strengthen their skill set, to gain volunteer experience, and to have practical experience with children and youth so that preservice teachers could be more effective when they became teachers:

> I would like to get a more hands-on experience working with students at various age groups. My specialization is early childhood education, but I wanted to get the experience working with older students at the elementary level. I also wanted to be able to integrate the themes that the [community program] has (i.e., determination, and being a leader) and learn how to work that into my teaching someday. (Zoey)

> The biggest thing for me is I'm a little worried that I'm going to get into a classroom and I would have had very little training on how to deal with children from different backgrounds, especially the English language thing. I'm worried that I'm not going to be able to teach them in a way that's best for them. So, my main thing is I wanted to learn sort of how to diversify my lesson plans and how to differentiate them to different groups and abilities. So, just sort of getting comfortable with kids of different abilities. (Elizabeth)

> The reason I signed up was because I was new to Calgary and I really wanted to do some volunteering. But I wasn't necessarily sure how to like go about it because I work a part time job, so the reason this appealed to me was because I wanted to get that volunteer experience, and broader viewpoint to bring to my own classroom for when I'm a teacher—or even when I go into my next practicum. (Annie)

Although each student expressed differing reasons for wishing to undertake the optional service-learning component during this semester, each communicated a desire for additional experience working with diverse children and youth to improve their future practice as teachers, usually with a fairly limited understanding or expectation of what that may entail.

During postplacement interviews, most preservice teachers shared that the SLPD enhanced their professional growth by helping to affirm their desire to teach, providing opportunities to practice planning and implementing lessons, and providing an opportunity to use their service-learning experience as part of their personal development portfolio and resource folder. In this respect, the SLPD met most of the preservice teachers' initial hopes to strengthen their skill set and be more effective teachers, which to them is a valuable component of the program:

> I had a chance to teach twice, and I used the same format both times. I realized later that I should have switched the format up. Because the relationship wasn't there, I felt like they weren't as engaged, especially the second time around. I think the first time around, they were like, "Oh! Who's this new person? We'll listen to what she has to say." Then, I think having known me a little bit, they maybe tuned out. So I think that was a real learning curve for me. . . . Some of the students actually left when I was teaching, and I wasn't offended by it, but I was aware that it affected me. I was like, "Okay, why are they leaving?" Not that I'm there to entertain them, but were they just not really interested in the program? or not interested in what I'm teaching? or how I'm teaching it? That was memorable, although it wasn't necessarily positive. . . . I guess they don't necessarily care what I know until they know that I care. (DLF)

These shifts in preservice teachers' skills and understanding about teaching and learning are critical to teacher preparation and should not be dismissed; however, our analysis of preservice teachers' comments show that these individual or professional benefits were immensely overshadowed by preservice teachers' comments about the ways in which the SLPD shifted their perspectives about the role of teachers and schools and enhanced their awareness and understanding of broader social needs and opportunities. For example, while the community placements were with organizations working with immigrant and ethnocultural children and youth, several preservice teachers described their growing awareness and interest around the intersectionality of different expressions of diversity and how they relate to schools and broader notions of inclusion:

> I saw how all the different kinds of diversity were at play. I saw a little bit of learning disability diversity within English language learning diversity. So I did see how all those things came together. Also, because [the community program is in the inner city], it's kind of a mixture: You have really fancy condos and then you have really crappy apartments. So the kids sort of come from—like you could tell that some kids had more money than others. So you could see how all of that was sort of influencing their dynamic

> in the group, which is something I wouldn't have thought about before. So, I really liked [the community placements] because I feel like a lot of classes were just kind of reflecting on things, and talking about things, but not really seeing their impact in classrooms. (Elizabeth)

Through her somewhat blunt and disparaging attention to aspects of income and social class disparity, Elizabeth highlights the significant role that socioeconomic status can play in terms of families' highly differential opportunities and resources. Unfortunately, despite the potential that public schools in North America have to teach and promote democracy and inclusion, it is perhaps not surprising that instead, "they perpetuated social class stratification and reinforced the class divisions within the larger society" (Banks, 2018, p. 374). One preservice teacher described how she used an example of homophobic language to open up a classroom discussion on discrimination:

> When we went to the sexual health talk that [the Diversity course] put on, a couple of weeks later, some of the kids [at the community program] were throwing out the word "fag" like it was no big deal. So I used the drawing that we had learned from the talk and asked, "So what do you mean when you say that word?" We did that activity and I felt way more comfortable diving into that activity since we had that talk and had that classroom knowledge. I felt like I didn't want to let that one go because it's not okay to say that. (Zoey)

Another demonstration of preservice teachers' movement away from individual goals and toward an awareness of broader social needs and opportunities is an enhanced understanding of the tension of promoting inclusion while addressing differences among several students. One student described this complex process as a "dance":

> Speaking with the lady who put on a seminar [for Muslim women], she's a mother whose children are in public school, I asked her what teachers in the public system could do to support her children. She really emphasized not making such an obvious effort to, not *not* include their religion, but to put it on display. Like, don't make a show of it, your attempts to be inclusive. I totally understand, because it alienates them more than includes them. I think that's one of the struggles that I'll constantly have as a teacher, is that fine line between being inclusive and being neglectful. I almost feel like being a White woman, a White teacher, from Western society, that it'll always seem a little insincere. Or it could be made to seem insincere regardless of what I do. It's going to be a very fine line, like a dance, basically. And I guess being sensitive to those that will appreciate it more and those that don't want it at all—whatever the needs of each individual student may be. (Maggie May)

Even those preservice teachers who identified as being "very new" to social justice and diversity education demonstrated a growing awareness of the rather fluid process of recognizing similarities and differences across different groups:

> I guess the thing that I was expecting was that it would be very hard to relate to the kids because they're immigrant children, but I just felt exactly the same as when I interact with non-immigrant children. So, I guess I feel more comfortable and not as foreign when I'm dealing with them, because they're just the same as every other kid. I guess that's my biggest revelation. I was expecting it to be so strange and them to be weird or whatever—I'm saying it in the worst terms possible—but I volunteer at the zoo, and I do these tours. Most of [the kids on the tours] are White kids because they can afford to pay and go to the zoo, but it was just exactly the same. I just approached it the same way, and the kids reacted the same way, and I guess it was just sort of a relief. It was nice to not have to change what I was doing and still be able to develop relationships with them. . . . It's not necessarily the immigrant child that's going to bring the difference. It could be anybody. (Katie)

This comment seems like an earnest attempt to see all students as sharing commonalities, but it verges on being an expression of "color-blindness" wherein inequities are ignored at the expense of seeking to treat all students equally; this is a trap into which many well-intentioned White educators easily fall (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, pp. 130–132). For teacher educators, one challenge is to address this more nuanced sense of promoting inclusion and similarities while recognizing differences and addressing systemic oppression of some minority groups.

On a related point, one preservice teacher commented on his heightened understanding of the need for strengthened collaboration between schools and the broader community and how the role of the teacher goes beyond school boundaries and school hours:

> If teachers are aware of all that's out there [in the community] and they can work in tandem or collaboratively, from the teacher's side of the coin, it opens up so many more possibilities in terms of planning lessons and contributing to curriculum and theory. There are so many things in the community that you can bring into the class and so many things in the class that you can bring into the community. And particularly with children at-risk, knowing all the resources that are out there, it can buffer your own pressure to get these kids what you know they need or what you think they need. It also extends our profession and our professionalism and what we can say are unique to us [as teachers]. So in terms of trust and value of teachers and education, working with the community and collaborating only furthers that. One of the biggest issues in education is a lack of trust in teachers and the value placed on the profession. Teachers are not blameless in that respect, but one of the solutions that I see is community engagement and involvement as part of the profession; so, creating a reciprocal relationship that goes beyond the 8:00 to 3:00 bell. (William)

Emergent Theme 3

For several preservice teachers, the SLPD opened up possibilities to act on their existing or growing interest in social justice work. For one preservice teacher, it provided an opportunity to experience and handle an "uncomfortable diversity situation" at her placement:

> There were a couple of boys that were putting on East Indian accents and there are three boys in the group that are East Indian and do have accents; they're very new to Canada. And the boys making the comments, one was White and one is from Peru. Some of the stuff that they were saying was humorous, but the whole thing was

> really insensitive. I ended up having a conversation with them. It was really hard for me to go into that conversation with them, especially with the boys [from East India] being there because I didn't want to act on their behalf, but I also didn't want to let it go and continue. So I talked about why it's not okay to do that. I don't know exactly what they took from it, but they stopped doing it. (Zoey)

For another student, the SLPD provided an opportunity to participate in and facilitate a critical discussion about hate:

> One day, when we were talking about the Olympics, one kid said that he hated another kid so they kind of got into this little fight. The facilitators, who are awesome, said, "We don't use the word hate." And that became a discussion on hate in Russia and how hatred can really make some people's lives really terrible. So we actually talked about the antigay laws in Russia, which I think went over some of their heads, but they did understand that for some people, they can't be who they are. So we had this crazy discussion and it was really interesting. And then this one kid, who is normally really disruptive, he put up his hand and was like, "Oh, I watched this documentary about this kid who was bullied. And he was bullied so much that he killed himself." And he had this really thoughtful response, and it's the last kid in the universe that you'd expect to be like this. . . . It was a really positive experience to witness that, especially with the kids that you wouldn't normally expect to speak up. (Elizabeth)

For William, the program provided an opportunity to address what he felt was an oppressive program rule with his community mentor and cofacilitators:

> There's a limited set of rules for the program. . . . One of [the rules] was, the program was an "English-only zone," even though many of [the youth] were fluent in their home languages because their parents speak it at home. [The youth] were not allowed to speak it [at the program] at all. And the kids were used to that. There was not a lot of pushback on that. I found it a bit odd or unsettling just because it runs contrary to what I'm being taught [in the BEd program] and how important home language is for integrating them into their new communities and furthering their own learning and education. You know, that's a *huge* building block that is being pushed aside. . . . I don't want to connect it to the experience of First Nations in residential schools where the language was stamped out, but it's on the same spectrum. Like, they don't hit the kids for speaking their dialects, but they might not feel welcomed. I raised those concerns, but beyond acknowledging them, there wasn't a lot of policy change. But I raised it. (William)

Leslie shared that the program provided opportunities to learn about what is and is not being offered to Indigenous children and youth, and she is now in the process of trying to establish an after-school program for Indigenous students:

> So I finally said to [mentor], "This is what I'm thinking. Maybe I can design something working toward a framework for an after-school type of a thing where you've got something like a [Gay/Straight Alliance]." So [mentor] connected me up with a teacher who has lots of Aboriginal students and we're going to meet and talk about this. I'm just going to try and get a little document that has things to think about, things to put in place. Because I know if I was a teacher having my own classroom, that's what I would want to do, right? And who cares if only two shows up? It doesn't matter. Just the idea of it being a safe, ethical space where [Indigenous children and youth] can learn that school is not all bad and that there is nurturing and healing. (Leslie)

These preservice teachers shared that the SLPD provided valuable opportunities for them to experience and handle "uncomfortable diversity situations" and address institutional barriers and policies, as well as fostering possibilities for future social justice efforts. The common thread among each of these experiences is preservice teachers' initiative to take some kind of action toward creating a more equitable and inclusive environment. In some cases, the action was situated in particular exchanges among a group of youth. In the case of William, he hoped to impact policy change by expressing his concerns to his community partners. For Leslie, the connections she made through the SLPD helped her begin to develop an initiative to enhance the well-being of Aboriginal children and youth in schools.

These preservice teachers demonstrated a desire to work toward social change, but they were also aware of the need to carefully consider the complexities and potential resistances of these efforts. For example, Zoey did not feel comfortable "representing" the boys who were being mocked, and William accepted that his efforts did not change the "English-only zone" rule. Leslie also considered the complexities of establishing an after-school program to support Indigenous children and youth:

> Somebody mentioned the other day when I was talking about [the creation of an after-school program] and she said she could see how there could be pushback from the community: Aboriginal kids are already kind of isolated and segregated, and this [after-school program] would make it even more so. And she said that the families in the community, the non-Aboriginal families, often have discriminating kinds of behaviors toward Aboriginal people, so to have something strongly represented as something that the school is doing, [the non-Indigenous families] might not appreciate that. (Leslie)

Despite some of the difficult barriers and inevitable tensions, these preservice teachers did not want to stand idly by when they felt that injustices were at play. One preservice teacher described this sense of urgency: "The thing is, when is it the right time to come out as an activist? You can't just be the long con, right?"

Conclusion

Highlighting a critical social justice approach in the course and focusing on linking theory with their community experiences allowed the preservice teacher-students to find much value and insight into the concepts and issues they explored in their diversity course. The service-learning placement and its community mentors became the coeducators for the semester, as the preservice teachers established positive professional relationships with the diverse children in their care.

By maintaining a strong and reciprocal link with each of the community agencies, the SLPD was able to guide the students' learning in a more integrated and experiential way. As Tinkler and Tinkler (2017) expressed it with their

own community-engaged research on teacher education, opening up your practice to the perspectives of local partners expands student learning; "awareness of community-wide conversations allows for the learning goals and objectives within a teacher's class to be framed and understood within the context of the broader, complex community rather than isolated within one class" (p. 10). In our case, this enriched understanding will inevitably benefit the future students of these preservice teachers.

Each of the themes addressed in this article highlights a key learning that came about from preservice teachers engaging directly in this innovative collaboration between community groups and a university program toward social justice. The findings amplify other voices calling for greater civic engagement of undergraduate students to facilitate global consciousness and the recognition of structural inequalities in education and beyond (Schoorman et al., 2019). Furthermore, all of the preservice teachers interviewed described the objectives and goals of the community programs from a strengths-based perspective.

Specifically, all preservice teachers were able to articulate the ways the community programs promoted self-esteem and a sense of belonging in diverse children and offered a safe place for them to "be themselves." Several preservice teachers shared that the program helped them become aware of the various supports available to children and youth of immigrant families. A significant majority of the participants shared that they attributed positive learning experiences to the community organizations and mentors and the ways they created a welcoming, open, and meaningful space to learn, question, and interact with the youth.

It is heartening to see the specific positive outcomes in preservice teacher learning that have come about through the continued reciprocal collaboration between a number of community agencies and a faculty of education. Their insights show how social justice concepts from the associated diversity-themed education course were brought to life and embodied in their daily interactions with diverse children in thriving community agency programs. Further research by one co-author has explored in more depth the responses from community agencies (Lee, 2017), and additional research needs to place a sharper focus on this dimension of all university service-learning partnerships. Moving forward, enhancing these valuable and mutually respectful relationships will continue to benefit the agencies, the university, the diverse children and youth, and the preservice professionals engaging in this vibrant form of community-engaged learning.

Notes

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